

Dr Yannis Koliouris, Professor Richard Wilding and Mike Bernon

## **10 tips to prepare your supply chain team for the post-pandemic world**

One lesson the pandemic taught us is that we should be careful in taking things for granted. In terms of Supply Chain Management there are a lot of viewpoints for these lessons, from inventory management to supplier selection, to modal selection even down to transport execution and development of transport corridors. Now, the question revolves around the “how’s” and when you prepare your supply chain to cope with such volatility. For one, continuous learning becomes a key success factor for both organisations and personal development in this dynamic business and societal environment. Developing the right skills will enable your team survive the changing landscape and outperform the competition.

But let’s take a step back. What are some of the mega-trends in supply chain that we have been talking about? How has hyper-competition, instant gratification, technology disruption and the pandemic affected our supply chains? In trying to summarise the most important trends, we expect that a number of pressures will influence supply chains. We see supply chains being shortened or even being localised. We also see that product lifecycles become shorter, whereas we all strive for multiple sourcing introducing multi-shoring strategies, in rapidly evolving market conditions with stricter regulatory contexts. Furthermore, sustainable buying patterns become the norm by both consumers and commercial buyers. Also, the technological change is rapidly changing operational practices and pushes companies explore omni-channel strategies. Last but certainly not least, we expect that the financial pressures, the companies’ focus on resilience, the labour shortages and the energy transition will affect both the customers and the companies alike.

Based on these megatrends, we have been particularly interested in the transitions in the business and societal environment and how we can leverage them. Accenture predicts a global cumulative US\$ 11.5 technology enabled GDP growth, which 14 out of the G20 countries might miss due to a widening skills gap, whereas the World Economic Forum’s Future of Jobs report estimates that 4 out of 10 skills will need to be replaced by 2025, requiring up to 50% of current employees to be re-skilled. Organisations are concerned about the aftermath of this pandemic in terms of business models and operational approaches, however, at Cranfield University we firmly believe this is a prime opportunity to improve our competitive advantage and upgrade Supply Chain effectiveness and we have been working towards developing such skills.

Based on our extensive experience at the Cranfield Centre for Logistics, Procurement and Supply Chain Management in executive development training, we can share the following 10 tips that we use and think will help upskill teams and subsequently upgrade your supply chain in preparation for a “new better”.

1. **Align Learning with Business Strategy**  
Ensure your learning function is aligned with the business strategy and the objectives of your team. We always discuss this with our partners during the learning needs analysis, where we develop specific learning paths. For example, mission critical supply chains require different procurement training from commodities’ supply chains, which we will specifically describe in advance.
2. **Embrace the Learning “Omni-Channel”**  
Embrace and apply the new learning channels and new learning approaches. For example, in order to cope with the demands of the day today running of operations, we have introduced blended learning approaches, combining the online and physical and developed material that learners can pick up on their own pace but also we create opportunities to work together with other learners. A new supply chain game

was developed conjointly with supply chain software specialist, Vuealta, can be taught remotely in a virtual environment for example Zoom.

### 3. Select learning speeds and exits

You have to understand that each team member has different needs and different availability which are constrained by everyday operational requirements. This is why we introduced smart variability in our programmes; learners may choose from specific credentials and qualifications like 6-sigma, or purchasing, from short courses as well as from full programmes. This way we help learners develop and follow their own personalised learning journey. For example, in our Postgraduate Certificate in Supply Chain Practice, learners attend either as short course delegates or as award bearing students who gain a certificate in Supply Chain Practice.

### 4. Develop a skill set vision

Understand what your team skillset should become. From the plethora of challenges down to selecting the specific skills to be developed, we have been prudent in prioritising the skills and helping our learners developing those. At the same time, we always consider the true needs of the company and allow for opportunities to put the learning in action, even before completing the programme.

### 5. Acknowledge the workplace landscape.

New modes of working, increased entrepreneurial attitudes and the gig Economy already shape operations and strategies. This is why we introduced economics theories and explain market dynamics in certain specialised modules among others in order to equip our learners with the confidence to deal with new business models and new supply chains that serve them.

### 6. Upskill to retain a competitive advantage

We need to appreciate the gap between demand for talent and supply. Especially for hard skills and tech talent, the supply is short and we need to upskill our colleagues effectively and quickly. Our structured approach where our learners get access to digital infrastructure, a cascading approach to training and access to Cranfield staff significantly accelerates learning.

### 7. Balance “Hard” and “Soft” skills

Our programmes where we teach among others about the changing landscape in logistics real estate, the changing role of the distribution centres, urban delivery points and network layouts as well as warehouse design and layout are well attended. However, we see a growing attendance in soft skills programmes, for example where we teach concepts and approaches that improve personal leadership, flexibility, innovativeness and resilience. We have experienced that the soft skills have been instrumental in companies surviving this pandemic and will continue playing a pivotal role as Supply Chain gets C-Level attention.

### 8. Finance is the “life blood”

Understand your cost-to-serve function is one of the most intricate concepts and supply chain leaders are now asked to play a very active role in the profitability of their companies. We have been among the first to explain this concept in our lectures. Our approach is to develop interdisciplinary skills such as product lifecycle costs, supply

chain finance and data analytics, information technologies and negotiations that enable learners understand the cost of over-servicing certain customers in the expense of under-servicing others.

#### 9. Prepare for project-based working

Don't forget building project management skills. We see a wave of project based working patterns which requires putting different skills in good use. Thus, we have introduced project management skills like negotiations, resourcing, budgeting, managing risks and most importantly personal organisation in our teaching. Learners are not only supported in building those skills but also supported in using them.

#### 10. Nurture and Protect future supply chain leaders

The pandemic showed vividly that those with the ability to reinvent and get the best from their teams, were those that seemed to have survived the storm. When cultivating the next leaders, connection with learners doesn't stop when a programme ends. Learners need continued access to learning material, teaching staff and importantly other learners so ideas can be shared, giving an opportunity to have a critical friend or a sounding board.

As we progressively return to the new normal, we propose these tips in order to plan ahead in terms of upskilling and further developing the personal qualities. Notwithstanding, Supply Chain Management has returned to the spotlight and will be required to play a crucial role in the post-pandemic business strategy, thus we advocate in favour of a lifelong learning culture as we move to a "new better"

Dr Yannis Koliouris, Professor Richard Wilding and Mike Bernon work in the Centre for Logistics, Procurement and Supply Chain Management, Cranfield University U.K. They work extensively with organisations from all sectors and are passionate about taking knowledge and creating Action in companies to improve economic, environmental and societal impact.